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ABSTRACT

Creative and inexpensive teaching suggestions for high school anthropology courses are presented. They are chosen specifically for programs which cannot afford expensive curriculum materials. All activities demonstrate the application of universal anthropological principles to the American society. Seven areas which reflect the general functions of culture are identified. Four activities illustrate the cultural relationship between human nature and environment. One project involves students in examining travel guides of the United States which foreign embassies provide. Another project challenges students to be 26th century archaeologists explaining the uses of chap stick and marbles. In the area of subsistence and economic exchange, students can compare slaughterhouse processing of meat with primitive methods seen in films. To illustrate rules of social organization, students can try greeting friends in a formal manner, or imagine the reaction of McDonalds patrons if a couple came in wearing formal evening attire. Concepts of politics and law can be studied by comparing biographical backgrounds of senators. Role playing of courtship behavior can illustrate rituals in American society, and making a list of common nonverbal gestures helps students to understand ways of communicating. Cultural change can be measured by watching fads come and go. (AV)

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BUDGET ANTHROPOLOGY: A UNIT SAMPLER

Most anthropological materials developed for classroom instruction rely heavily upon the exotic appeal of other cultures. The contrast of alien lifestyles with Western civilization is both striking and instructive. However, schools and teachers who lack the funding necessary to purchase an expensive anthropology curriculum, or, who merely wish to supplement an existing program, can successfully turn the anthropologist's perspective on the American way of life.

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BUDGET ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropologists James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy outline seven investigative areas which "reflect the general functions of culture and the fundamental interests of anthropology."[1] Worldwide anthropological field work is guided by similar theoretical frameworks. These broad behavioral categories have been borrowed intact to demonstrate the application of universal anthropological principles to the American community.

I. Human Nature and Culture: The specialized adaptation of man to his environment is culture. Different cultures around the world represent changing human adjustments to a changing world. It has always been easy for anthropologists to judge non-Western, 'primitive' societies; a different perspective is needed to be objective about one's own culture. The student of anthropology who chooses to examine American culture must be an insider and an outsider at the same time.

1. The Body Ritual of the Nacirema- Horace Miner's classic essay on exotic "Nacirema" (American backwards) toilet behavior can be richly illustrated with slides or photographs of aboriginal rituals and accompanied by jungle drums. After proper exposure to this primitive behavior, a tape with patriotic anthems can introduce scenes from American bathrooms and hospitals. This unforgettable objective-subjective demonstration of ethnocentrism provides a definition of culture context with impact!

2. In the Year 2525- Teacher assembles a number of twentieth century artifacts, e.g. pocket knife, chap stick, marbles, and ticket stubs. Students are twenty-sixth century archaeologists or visitors from another planet who must describe their discoveries to an audience unfamiliar with the unearthed culture. Culture-bound descriptions of an artifact's structure and function are obviously unacceptable.

3. The Nacirema Viewpoint- Students will describe everyday American behavior objectively and in a culture-free context as Miner did in (1) above. Sun-bathing, record hops, football games, and election rallies would all make interesting subjects for the ethnographic 'outsider' getting his first glimpse of American life.

4. A Visit to the USA- Most embassies in Washington, D.C., offer inexpensive travel guides to their nationals who visit our shores. Where language permits, a look at the tips and warnings given these visitors provides interesting material for discussion.

[1]James P. Spradley and David McCurdy, Anthropology Through Literature, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973), p. vii.

II. Subsistence and Economic Exchange: Every culture has its own blueprint for subsistence. Historically, many traditional societies relied on principles of reciprocity and redistribution to maintain their economic systems: the ostentatious potlatch of the Kwakiutl is one classic example. Today, the market exchange of the Western capitalist mode is becoming increasingly widespread.

1. From Plain to Platter- Students cringe at the barbaric butchering of game in several of the MACOS films; Kalahari Bushmen are equally 'savage' in The Hunters. View one of these films or read an account of subsistence hunting. After allowing students to react to the non-Western slaughter and butchering of meat, take them to a slaughter house or a butcher shop for a comparative perspective.

2. Kool-Aid- Most Americans are taught the basic principles of capitalism and the market place at an early age. Either from memory or from observation, students should analyze an early, formative economic experience- the first lemonade stand, a neighborhood carnival, summertime skits. The analysis should emphasize the sophisticated economic mechanisms working at such an elementary level: capitalization, depreciation, overhead, reinvestment.

3. Dust to Dust- As in the first exercise above, Americans rarely particpate in any of their own subsistence activities from start to finish. Lettuce comes encapsulated in saran wrap; body wastes disappear down a sanitary white tunnel. Visits to other stations within out complex economic system help complete an unfinished cycle. Migrant laborers toiling in the fields, workers on an assembly line, food processing plants, and sewage treatment areas all provide a broader view of the American economic system.

III. Social Organization: Cultures are macro-arrays of positions and statuses. The personalities occupying these statuses display appropriate role behavior thereto. This individual behavior within culturally acceptable statuses gives each person his cultural identity.

1. One Plus One Equals Eight- Standard kinship notation is an algebra that any student loves. Males are triangles, females are circles, marriage is an equals sign, and children appear on descending branches. (See Schusky's Manual for Kinship Analysis for a more detailed explanation.) Using these symbols, students can diagram their families, famous kinsmen, or any social group.

2. The Wrong Address- Every person brings a set of rules and expectations to a social encounter. Conscious violations of this social code produce interesting culture conflicts. Students should go home and address well-known friends and siblings in unfamiliar, formal fashion. For instance, "Hi, Beth!" becomes "Good evening, Miss Wallace." Or, reversing the situation, the very proper Latin instructor, Mr. Broadbent, is greeted as Ronnie. Consequences aside, the results clearly illustrate the purpose of formality and informality in social ranking.

3. Two All-Beef Patties... Similar to (2) above, any culturally appropriate behavior can be staged in an appropriate cultural context. How would McDonald's patrons react to a foursome wearing dinner jackets and gowns, eating by candlelight, and listening to Brahms? The attire and behavior of the American elite on show are hardly compatible with a walk-in franchise.

IV. Politics, Government, and Law: No culture is free of dispute and conflict. When such disruptions violate the cultural pattern, an orderly system of resolution and restoration of harmony must be readily available. These regulatory mechanisms, often codified as laws, are usually administered by power-endowed members of the culture in question.

1. Red Light- A simple test of a motor code's legality against a motorist's expediency is stop sign/red light violator counting. An offender to law-abider ratio is easily scored while sitting at a busy intersection. The time of day, the type of weather, the sex of the driver, and the model of car might all be independent variables of note.

2. The Candidate- Obtain biographical information of a like group of American politicians- governors, senators, Presidents. Prepare a statistical profile of the 'ideal' candidate in the American political culture. Consider items such as age, sex, race, physical appearance, socioeconomic background, education, and work experience.

3. What Is An American? Justly or unjustly, every major nationality and ethnic group is widely stereotyped. Scotsmen are thrifty, Germans are militaristic.... Submit a list of 20-30 descriptive personal adjectives to students; ask them to pick five most descriptive of Americans, then five typical of the Chinese...

4, Le Monde- If they're available in a nearby metropolitan area, foreign newspapers and magazines often provide an interesting commentary on many aspects of American life, especially politics.

V. Religion and World View: Religion is a re-affirmation of a culture's fundamental beliefs. Besides being a moral statement writ large, religion also reduces individual cultural anxiety by offering an explanation of the unexplainable and the unknown.

1. Rock 'n Roll Values- Analysis of the lyrics of popular songs, a sort of contemporary ethnomusicology, provides value statements of and about today's young people. Regional and ethnic music, such as Country-Western and Soul, may likewise be studied for sub-cultural themes.

2. Matinee Idol- What attributes do Americans look for in the people they 'worship'? A composite list of the characteristics of a movie or TV idol can easily be constructed.

3. Rites of Passage- Certain periods in the life cycle of an individual are recognized and honored by that individual's culture. In the recent film, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, bar mitzvahs were filmed for their cultural significance. Other ceremonies and rites which could be recorded and analyzed include baptisms, birthdays, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, deaths, and our recent Bicentennial.

4. Courtship Behavior-Is there a dating ritual or prescribed ceremony behind American courtship? What paints and adornments do females don? What is a culturally appropriate series of moves and countermoves leading to the first kiss? Considerations of courtship rituals lend themselves to classroom forums and non-directive role playing.

VI. Language and Communication: Communication- symbolic, vocal, and written, is essential to the preservation and maintenance of any cultural community. Communication facilitates cooperation, which in turn characterizes man, the social animal.

1. Inner Space- Six inches is comfortable speaking distance for Arabs; three to four feet is generally acceptable to Americans. Interesting social consequences occur by varying the personal space between conversants.

2. That's Not Snow! Skiers have at least a dozen terms which describe slope conditions. Eskimos have over fifty words for snow. The famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis describes an intimate relationship among speech, cognition, and environment. Students have many specialized vocabularies to explore. How many types of murder to lawyers recognize? Tobacco growers produce how many leaf types? Do dermatologists treat twenty kinds of acne?

3. V Is For Victory- Make a non-verbal vocabulary list. What gestures do athletes use? What hand signals are useful in driving? piloting an airplane?.... What subtleties of body language are evident in the classroom? at a school dance? at the beach?...

VII. Culture Contact and Change: Cultural traditions change from within and without. New ideas and innovations may be advanced by a culture member; an appealing change may be borrowed from another group. The nature and frequency of culture change is unpredictable, yet inevitable.

1. Fads- An obvious and perhaps overworked activity illustrating cultural innovation is the study of fads. Clothing styles, hair length, streaking, and now pieing have all enjoyed the fleeting limelight. An interesting variation is a class creating its own fad and following its dissemination throughout a school or community.

2. Old Timers- Lest today's students perceive their culture as static, interviewing parents and grandparents is in order. How has linguistic usage and slang changed over the years? Has morality and courtship behavior evolved? What were the traits of yesterday's politicians and stars?

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